

Frank Lamson-Scribner (1851- 1938)

Frank Lamson-Scribner became the USDA's first agrostologist in 1895, heading up the newly created [Division of Agrostology](#). He was nominated for this position by fellow U.S. botanists: "Secretary of Agriculture [J. Sterling Morton](#)...polled the country's top botanists.... [t]heir overwhelming recommendation was Scribner."¹

Lamson-Scribner began his botanical investigations as a child and published his first article (on the weeds of Maine) when he was 18.² He went on to develop a special interest in grasses, and one of his botanical role models was the USDA's [George Vasey](#). After university, Lamson-Scribner taught botany for many years and gained a national reputation from his revision of the North American *Melicae* and his service with the Northern Transcontinental Survey.³ Hired to head the USDA's Section of Mycology in 1886, he was responsible for solving significant plant pathology problems, such as the control of black rot and downy mildew.⁴ From 1888 to 1895, Lamson-Scribner was professor of botany and horticulture at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, as well as botanist to UT's agricultural experiment station.⁵ When hired to head the USDA's Division of Agrostology in 1895, he established the Division's second experimental grass garden at UT Knoxville.⁶



Frank Lamson-Scribner. Source: National Archives photo no. 16-FLS-54-3

Under Lamson-Scribner, the Division of Agrostology was organized with speed and efficiency. In the five years he headed the Division, he hired and deployed field agents to collect grass roots, seed, and sod from across the United States; added almost 25,000 sheets of mounted grass specimens to the National Herbarium; expanded and maintained two experimental grass gardens; conducted histological studies; and maintained an aggressive publication schedule.

In 1901, Lamson-Scribner became Chief of the Insular Bureau of Agriculture for the Philippine Islands, and later became a member of the U.S. Government Exhibit Board where he "organized and presented agricultural exhibits for the government at numerous expositions throughout the world, even beyond his retirement in 1922."⁷

For more information on Frank Lamson-Scribner:

Hilty, J. W. and P. D. Peterson, Jr. "[Frank Lamson-Scribner: botanist and pioneer plant pathologist in the United States.](#)" *Annual Review of Phytopathology* 35 (1997): 17-26.

Archival Collections related to Frank Lamson-Scribner:

Library of Congress F. Lamson Scribner Papers, 1885-1938. (MSS29272)

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms012185>

Frank Lamson-Scribner's USDA contributions on the subject of grasses:

Lamson-Scribner, F. "[Grasses as sand and soil binders](#)." In *Yearbook of Agriculture for 1894*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1895.

———. "[Grass gardens](#)." In *Yearbook of Agriculture for 1895*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1896.

———. "[Grasses of salt marshes](#)." In *Yearbook of Agriculture for 1895*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1896.

———. "[Division of Agrostology](#)." In *Yearbook of Agriculture for 1897*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1898.

———. "[Lawns and Lawn making](#)." In *Yearbook of Agriculture for 1897*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1898.

Henry, Thomas and F. Lamson-Scribner. *Descriptions of New or Little-Known Grasses*. Studies on American Grasses, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Division of Agrostology Bulletin no. 11. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1898.

Lamson-Scribner, F. [Economic Grasses](#) . Washington, D.C. : U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Division of Agrostology, 1898.

———. "[Sand-binding grasses](#)." In *Yearbook of Agriculture for 1898*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1899.

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———. [American grasses I, Descriptions of the species](#). U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Division of Agrostology Bulletin no. 7, 3rd ed. Washington, DC : Government Printing Office, 1900.

———. "[Our native pasture plants](#)." In *Yearbook of Agriculture for 1900*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901.

———. *American grasses II*. U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Division of Agrostology Bulletin no. 17, rev. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901.

———. [*American grasses. III, Description of the tribes and genera*](#). U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Division of Agrostology Bulletin no. 20, rev. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1900.

Pammel, L.H. , J.B. Weems, and F. Lamson-Scribner. [*Pastures and meadows of Iowa*](#) . Ames, Iowa : Iowa Agricultural College, Experiment Station, 1901.

Lamson-Scribner, F. [*Records of seed distribution and cooperative experiments with grasses and forage plants*](#) . Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1902.

¹ F. Lamson-Scribner, "Report of the Agrostologist for 1898," In *Report of the Secretary of Agriculture* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1898) 25.

² J. W. Hilty and P. D. Peterson, Jr., [*"Frank Lamson-Scribner: botanist and pioneer plant pathologist in the United States,"*](#) *Annual Review of Phytopathology* 35 (1997): 18.

³ Ibid, 19.

⁴ Ibid, 20-21.

⁵ Ibid, 22.

⁶ F. Lamson-Scribner, "Report of the Agrostologist," In *Annual reports of the Department of Agriculture* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1895) 167.

⁷ Hilty and Peterson, 25.